

MEETING OF THE HOUSTON/GALVESTON NAVIGATION
SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
May 24, 2000

On the call of its sponsor, Rear Admiral Paul J. Pluta, USCG, Commander, Eighth Coast Guard District, and after public notice in the Federal Register (Meeting Notice, 65 Fed. Reg. 21800, Apr. 24, 2000), the fifty-seventh meeting of the Houston/Galveston Navigation Safety Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, May 24, 2000. The meeting was held in the Conference Room at the Houston Pilots' Office, Houston, Texas. The published agenda for the meeting is included as enclosure (1). A list of attendees is attached as enclosure (2). The documents which were made available to and/or prepared by the Committee are available for public inspection and copying at the office of the Committee's Executive Secretary, CDR Peter S. Simons, USCG, at U.S. Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service Houston/Galveston, 9640 Clinton Drive, Houston, TX 77029. A verbatim recording of the meeting is available upon request. Requests for copies of the recording must be received by May 25, 2002.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Tim Leitzell at 8:42 AM.

OPENING REMARKS BY COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Commander Kevin Cook welcomed members and guests. He noted that Captain Gusman sent his regrets for being unable to attend the Committee's meeting. Personal matters out-of-state prevented him from participating. Commander Cook noted that June 1 was the beginning of the Hurricane Season and that the Marine Safety Office was reviewing its hurricane preparedness plan in preparation for the upcoming season. Commander Cook urged those in attendance to similarly review their own preparations. Commander Cook then introduced Captain Kevin Eldridge, Chief of Staff, Eighth Coast Guard District.

OPENING REMARKS BY COMMITTEE SPONSOR'S REPRESENTATIVE

Captain Eldridge welcomed the members and guests. Captain Eldridge offered comments on reductions in Coast Guard operations necessitated by budget shortfalls. Captain Eldridge reassured those present that critical mission areas, such as search and rescue and the servicing of aids to navigation, would not be significantly impacted. Captain Eldridge also noted that personnel at Coast Guard Headquarters were working closely with Congress to address the current year funding shortfall.

Captain Eldridge also recognized Skaugen Petrotrans for their success in being selected as the runner up in the large vessel category of the Benkert Award, which recognizes corporate excellence in marine environmental protection efforts.

Captain Eldridge also noted that the May 2000 meeting represented an important milestone for the Committee. Ten new Committee members will be sworn in. The lengthy nomination process which led to their appointment was the most successful in the Committee's history. He complimented the Committee on the success of their May 4th working group meeting.

Finally, Captain Eldridge highlighted the Department of Transportation Marine Transportation System initiative. He briefly discussed the history of MTS-related outreach efforts and encouraged attendance at the MTS Listening Session to be held in Houston on July 17th and July 18th at the J. W. Marriott-Galeria. A copy of the Federal Register Notice announcing the MTS Regional Listening Sessions was included in the handout material provided to those in attendance at the meeting (enclosure (3)).

Captain Eldridge also recognized two Committee members for their contributions to the Committee and for their success in enhancing navigation safety in the Houston/Galveston area. Captain Jack Smith, of the Galveston-Texas City Pilots, was awarded the Coast Guard Certificate of Merit for his service on the Committee from January 1995 to May 1999. Tim Leitzell was awarded the Coast Guard Public Service Commendation for his service as Chairman of the Committee from May 1996 to May 2000.

Captain Eldridge then administered the oath of public service to the ten new Committee members.

OPENING REMARKS BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chairman Leitzell welcomed the new Committee members, noting that he was particularly encouraged that all of the Committee vacancies had been filled and that he was looking forward to working with the new members of the Committee.

Chairman Leitzell then called for nominations from the Committee for Chairman. Tim Leitzell was unanimously elected to serve an additional term as Committee chair. Chairman Leitzell then called for nominations from the Committee for Vice Chairman. Kelly Teichman was unanimously elected to serve an additional term as Committee Vice Chair.

APPROVAL OF MAY 24, 2000 MINUTES

A motion was made and seconded to approve the previous meeting's minutes. (Minutes of the previous meeting are included as enclosure (3) to these minutes.)

OLD BUSINESS

Dredging projects.

Larry Miller noted that a dredging project status sheet had been prepared and was handed out. (A copy is included as enclosure (4).) He introduced Dalton Krueger, Corps of Engineers Galveston District, to provide an update on additional dredging issues. Mr. Krueger noted that there were two changes to the status sheet. First, the Upper Bayou Reach dredging operation was behind schedule. Therefore, completion would likely be sometime after September 2000. Second, the Lower Bayou Reach dredging should be complete in September 2002 (rather than November 2000 as indicated on the status sheet).

Mr. Krueger also noted that the oyster reef construction project was going well, with 7 of 12 pads constructed to date. He estimated completion in January 2001. He noted that the project to restore Red

Fish Island was underway. The Corps is currently evaluating three proposals suggested by the Beneficial Use Group. The Corps anticipates developing plans and specifications in July and August of this year with construction to begin tentatively in January 2001.

Mr. Krueger also noted that the Corps is currently evaluating the barge lanes project, focusing on the potential environmental impacts of barge lane construction. He indicated that plans and specifications for the barge lanes project would probably begin in the August 2001 timeframe with construction scheduled to begin in January 2002. Mr. Krueger noted that Corps Headquarters continues to have questions about the agency's authority to construct the barge lanes. However, his staff is moving forward with the study of environmental impacts as well as the project's plans and specifications phases pending resolution of this matter at the Headquarters level.

Captain Morris asked when the mid-Bay dredging contract would begin. Mr. Krueger noted that it would be one of the last to be awarded, with work beginning in May 2001.

Captain Morris also asked how far up the Bay barge lanes would be dredged. Mr. Krueger noted that barge lanes already exist from Bolivar up to Light 51 (because of naturally deep water and value-engineering dredging the Corps was able to perform in conjunction with existing contracts). The Corps is currently examining the issue of barge lanes between Red Fish and Morgan's Point. Mr. Krueger believes that authorization to construct the barge lanes will appear in the Fiscal Year 2001 authorization act for the Corps. He also noted that the barge lanes project will likely require a supplemental environmental impact statement.

Mr. Miller reported on the status of various private dredging projects. Dredging at GATX, Armco and Shell is complete. Mr. Miller noted that the availability of disposal areas was an issue for private and Port of Houston Authority dredging projects. Projects at seven private terminals were impacted by the lack of available disposal space.

Mr. Miller noted that the Port has developed a dredge material disposal site maintenance plan. The goal of the plan is to maximize the use of available sites by improving the efficiency of the disposal process. (For example, minimizing the amount of water deposited at a disposal site in conjunction with dredge spoils so that more room is available for solid spoils material.)

Barge lanes.

Mr. Jackson provided a handout to the Committee which summarized the present status of barge lanes along the Houston Ship Channel. (The handout is included as enclosure (5).) Mr. Jackson indicated that the Port is working to ensure that authorization language is included in the Fiscal Year 2001 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill. In the view of the Port, this should resolve any issue as to whether the Corps has authority to construct barge lanes.

Mr. Jackson also distributed a series of reports entitled "Bolivar Crossing Feasibility Study." (Enclosure (6)). The reports document the Texas Department of Transportation's study of the feasibility of

constructing a bridge from Galveston to the Bolivar Peninsula. Mr. Jackson will track this issue for the Committee.

Electronic navigation.

Captain Morris noted that the Houston Electronic Navigation Committee would be meeting in the offices of the Houston Pilots at 1400. [The next meeting of the Electronic Navigation Committee will be on Tuesday, September 12, 2000 at 1400 in the offices of the Houston Pilots.]

Captain Morris noted that the Houston Pilots continue to work with four vendors (Hydrographic Associates, ARINC, Star Link and Ross Engineering). He indicated that, with the extension of the ship channel into the Gulf of Mexico in conjunction with the deepening and widening project, electronic navigation tools will become increasingly important. Captain Morris noted that members of the Houston Pilots Association felt that systems must be capable of providing heading information but that this increased the effective weight of state-of-the-market carry aboard systems.

Finally, Captain Morris noted that at a March 2000 meeting in New Orleans the Navigation Safety Advisory Committee discussed issues raised in the HOGANSAC's June 1999 letter. (That letter documented the Committee's concern regarding mariners' increasing reliance on electronic navigation systems and the lack of appropriate laws and regulations governing the use of such systems.) NAVSAC appointed a subcommittee, which Captain Morris is a member of, to further examine the issue (looking into topics such as legal concerns, training/licensing requirements, circumstances governing use of electronic navigation equipment).

Chairman Leitzell asked whether other ports were examining electronic navigation issues. Captain Morris indicated that there were and that Houston, in fact, was probably behind other ports in terms of its familiarity with the issue. However, only New Orleans is advertising that the availability of electronic navigation systems will enable ships to move during all visibility and weather conditions.

AtoN Knockdown Working Group.

Ms. Teichman reported on the progress of a working group formed to address the high incidence of aids to navigation damage along the Houston Ship Channel. The group included representatives from the Texas Waterway Operators Association, the Committee, Group Galveston and Vessel Traffic Service Houston/Galveston. The group has held an initial meeting and plans a follow-up meeting on June 9th. Currently, the group plans outreach efforts to tug and tow companies (to highlight the problem and clarify reporting requirements when an aid to navigation is damaged), additional data analysis (to identify the underlying causes of aids to navigation damage), and development of a standardized report form (to ensure that mariners know what information needs to be reported to the Coast Guard when aids are damaged or destroyed). The working group hopes that the report form will also lead to a more thorough data base for analyzing the problem of aids to navigation discrepancies. Ms. Teichman also noted that, since the beginning of the working group's efforts, reporting of aids to navigation discrepancies has increased.

Commander Simons reported on the data analysis being performed by Mr. Garry Jarvis, a traffic controller at the Vessel Traffic Service. Mr. Jarvis has looked at the influence of eight factors (volume of traffic, wind speed and direction, vessel horsepower, tug configuration, tow dimensions, presence of channel operations and hazards, current and location of the damaged aid) on the incidence of aids to navigation knockdown. Commander Simons noted that the meeting information packet (enclosure (3)) contained two handouts documenting Mr. Jarvis' effort. He asked Committee members, and those in attendance, to review the list of factors. Based upon that review, members of the Committee suggested that the available data be further analyzed to address the following issues: whether tugs involved in AtoN knockdowns were pushing loaded or empty barges; whether AtoN knockdowns were causally related to reduced visibility conditions; and what percentage of tugs transiting the Houston Ship Channel have 1200 horsepower or less.

Facility Mooring Depth Survey Project.

CDR Simons reported on the progress of the mooring depth survey project. After the working group met with members of the Marine Exchange of the West Gulf's Terminal and Facility Owner/Operator Committee a revised survey form was sent (in March of this year) to 107 channel-side facilities in the Houston/Galveston area. Approximately 90% of those facilities have responded to the questionnaire. One of the VTS watch sections has been compiling the information into a database and conducting quality-control checks of the returned data. The working group plans to meet again in mid-June to conduct its own quality-control analysis of the data, complete a final review of the list of surveyed facilities, decide on a format and establish a timeline for publication of the data and develop a policy regarding the frequency with which compiled information should be updated.

NOAA Issues.

Ms. Clark reported on the status of various NOAA issues on behalf of Commander Alan Bunn who was unable to attend the meeting.

Commander Bunn is retiring at the end of May. His position will become a civilian position. Candidates for his position have been identified. A hiring decision is expected by the end of June. (Commander Bunn has applied for the new civilian position.)

Several PORTS-related developments were discussed. The Morgan's Point PORTS meter, which was removed for dredging operations, has been serviced and reinstalled. The Bolivar Roads buoy will be serviced in July of this year. NOAA is ready to let a contract with a Texas-area organization to serve as the regional PORTS maintenance contractor. NOAA's PORTS reprogramming request was approved. As a result, NOAA's agreement with the Port of Houston Authority to have the Port serve as the regional administrator of the PORTS system has been forwarded to the Port for final signature. Once the agreement is in place, the Port will have to assemble a user group to provide input on uses of, and priorities for expanding, the system.

Representatives from NOS met with the Houston Pilots earlier this year to discuss an unannounced datum change which affected the accuracy of tide gauge readings. Based on that meeting, the Houston Pilots sent out a

letter documenting the effect of the change on the Association's policies regarding the limiting draft of vessels navigating the ship channel.

NOAA received only a portion of the funds they had requested for hydrographic survey work. As a result, NOAA is hosting a series of navigational charting workshops for those areas in which survey work cannot be accomplished because of funding constraints. The workshops will enable any waterway user with any information about chart or Coast Pilot inaccuracies to provide that input directly to a NOAA representative. The information will be compiled into a database from which NOAA surveyors will work to verify the alleged inaccuracy and correct it where necessary. The Houston-area workshop will take place sometime this summer. The initiative applies to electronic chart inaccuracies as well as those depicted on the standard paper charts.

NEW BUSINESS

Aids to Navigation Presentation.

Commander Todd Gentile, representing the Eighth Coast Guard District's Office of Aids to Navigation, discussed the aids to navigation changes necessitated by the deepening and widening project. Once the entire project is complete, aids along the entrance channel extension will be established. This will entail disestablishing two approach buoys (Galveston Bay Entrance Traffic Lane Lighted Buoys "I" and "K") and replacing them with gated buoys marking the limits of the newly dredged channel. In lower Galveston Bay, all the beacons from Light 27 to Light 50 will be moved out to mark positions which are 500 feet from the new centerline of the channel. Permission to make these changes, once dredging along the affected range has been completed, has already been given to Group Galveston. Two new ranges will be constructed to mark the new centerlines for Galveston Bay Inner and Outer bar channels. These ranges will have day-night optics. Construction is scheduled to begin in July with completion in October and November of this year. From Light 50 to Light 76 few changes in aids to navigation are anticipated since the dredging will not alter the current channel centerline. Once environmental studies on the barge lanes are approved (and dredging for the barge lanes completed) lights in this area will be moved out to positions 500 feet from the channel centerline. One range, Upper Galveston Bay Inner Range, will have to be relocated. It will also be converted to day-night optics.

In response to a request for clarification from Captain Eldridge, Mr. Krueger noted that, depending upon the results of the environmental study, barge lanes up to 500 feet from the centerline of the dredged channel will be constructed all the way to Morgan's Point. (Mr. Krueger did note that what constitutes "Morgan's Point" still needs to be resolved.)

From Light 76 to Barbour's Cut the slight offset nature of the deepening and widening project will require the relocation of two existing ranges. Planning for the relocation is already underway. In the area above Light 93, 22 ranges will be relocated. Commander Gentile noted that he has a meeting with the Houston Pilots scheduled for the week of May 31 to discuss the relocation of these aids. The project has been approved by Coast Guard Headquarters with funding being requested in Fiscal Year 2001 and 2002. Ranges in this area will be offset ranges, set 90 feet from

the centerline, to mark both inbound and outbound portions of the dredged channel.

Commander Gentile then introduced Captain Rich Cusson, Chief, Office of Aids to Navigation, Eighth Coast Guard District. Captain Cusson expressed his appreciation for the work of the AtoN Knockdown Working Group, noting that the group should also feel free to suggest changes to AtoN configurations in conjunction with its work. Captain Cusson noted that the issue of background lighting obscuring aids to navigation was raised during an outreach meeting he held the prior day with members of the pilots' association and representatives of the towing and recreational boating community. Captain Cusson noted that background lighting was a Captain of the Port issue and he was thus raising it for consideration by the full Committee. Finally, Captain Cusson noted that the upcoming regional listening session on the marine transportation system was the perfect opportunity for waterway users and stakeholders to express their views on needed waterway improvements (e.g., barge lanes, dredging requirements). He challenged those in attendance to think strategically about waterway needs in the future and develop a list of requirements based upon that desired future state.

Marking of Red Fish Island.

Ms. Roof noted that the rebuilding of the reef and island would create an attractive nuisance for recreational boaters. As a result, the recreational boating community requested that the Coast Guard establish aids to navigation in the vicinity of the island. Ms. Roof read into the record a recommendation from the Committee regarding navigation safety at Redfish Island. A copy of the recommendation is included as enclosure (7) to these minutes. The recommendation was seconded and approved by the full Committee.

Ms. Roof indicated that the Coast Guard, at its May 23rd aids to navigation outreach meeting, had agreed to establish aids to navigation in the vicinity of Redfish Island. She appreciated the cooperation of the Coast Guard, in particular Captain Cusson and representatives from his office, in resolving this issue.

Mr. Schwantes expressed his appreciation to the Coast Guard for their support on the issue. He noted that the recreational boating community also has an obligation to educate itself regarding appropriate uses of Redfish Island in particular as well as general issues of boating safety.

Captain Cusson offered several helpful suggestions to the Committee regarding available boating safety education resources. Captain Cusson also explained the background behind the Coast Guard's decision to establish aids to navigation in the area. Captain Cusson emphasized, however, that the intent behind establishing one or more aids in the area would not be to create a navigable channel.

Safety Zone Enforcement Issues

Captain Godinich asked that this issue be placed on the agenda for the September meeting. Commander Cook noted that the Coast Guard intended to look into this issue in the interim, noting that factors underlying the approval process as well as safety zone enforcement were areas for emphasis.

Monitoring of VHF-FM Radio Frequencies

Captain Morris noted that by law vessels transiting the ship channel were obligated to monitor VHF-FM Channel 16. He felt that the number of radio frequencies already monitored on the bridge of a ship made it difficult, if not impractical, to continue monitoring Channel 16. He asked that the Captain of the Port consider issuing a policy statement to exempt vessels participating in the Vessel Traffic Service from the requirement to monitor Channel 16. He noted that, since vessels were monitoring Channel 13 already, a common radio frequency was available for contacting all vessels along the Houston Ship Channel.

Commander Cook promised to look into the issue. He indicated that a first step would be to take a look at the wording of the requirement to see what is was intended to address.

Commander Simons noted that there is a provision in the Code of Federal Regulations exempting vessels monitoring one or more of the VTS frequencies and Channel 13 from having to monitor Channel 16 as well. Several years ago, the District Commander waived the requirement that vessels along the ship channel monitor the VTS working frequency covering the area they are transiting. That waiver, in effect, obligates vessels to monitor Channel 16. Commander Simons suggested that the issue of frequency monitoring be referred to a working group. That group should also look into the issue of congestion on the VTS working frequencies. He also indicated that a waiver of the requirement to monitor Channel 16 was probably outside the authority of the Captain of the Port.

Mr. Schwantes noted that recreational boaters rely upon Channel 16 as a general hailing and distress frequency for contacting ships transiting the ship channel. He indicated that any deviation from the monitoring requirement for piloted ships would need to be communicated to the recreational boating community to avoid future misunderstandings.

Mr. Miller noted that the problem affected all vessels using the Houston Ship Channel, not just piloted vessels. He suggested that any working group formed to look into the issue should include representatives from the tug and tow industry as well.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the full Committee will be held at the Corps of Engineers facility in Galveston on Tuesday, September 12, 2000. The meeting will begin at 10:00 am. The Corps of Engineers building is located at 2000 Fort Point Road. The meeting will be held in the conference room.

The Committee's working groups will meet on Tuesday, August 22 at the Houston Port Authority building (111 East Loop North, Houston), beginning at 9:00 am.

CLOSING COMMENTS BY CAPTAIN ELDRIDGE

Captain Eldridge expressed his appreciation for the Committee's efforts in attempting to accommodate the District Commander's schedule. Captain Eldridge noted that although the District Commander is particularly busy

he likes to attend HOGANSAC meetings whenever possible. Captain Eldridge indicated that the Admiral appreciates and relies heavily upon the work of HOGANSAC and the other Federal advisory committee within his district.

Captain Eldridge also complimented the Committee on the level of participation at the meeting. He encouraged the Committee to continue its important work to improve the safety of navigation along the ship channel. He specifically cited the Committee for its work on barge lanes, aids to navigation and facility mooring depth issues.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 am.

KEVIN S. COOK
Acting Executive Director

Certified: TIMOTHY R. LEITZELL
Committee Chair

Encl: (1) Published Agenda
(2) List of Members and Guests in Attendance
(3) Meeting handout material
 -Federal Register Notice of meeting
 -Federal Register Notice of MTS Listening Session
 -Minutes for the HOGANSAC meeting of January 28, 2000
 -AtoN Knockdown slides
(4) Dredging project update sheet
(5) Barge lanes status sheet
(6) Reports on Bolivar Crossing Feasibility Study
(7) HOGANSAC recommendation regarding navigational safety at RedFish Island